

In 2014 a ground penetrating radar study was performed around the 1717 sanctuary revealing the possibility of colonial era graves and other anomalies.

In 2016 the sanctuary roof was replaced revealing the original cypress shingles and wrought iron nails. That same year the Fairfield Foundation began a probe study on the grounds. Continued study has revealed 18th century artifacts.

Items of historical interest:

Located outside, directly behind the east end of the sanctuary, are the graves of two children, Dorothy and Thomas Blackburn (death dates of 1726 and 1727). The ravages of time have rendered the grave stones practically unreadable.

Inside the church are a hand carved chest and a grave stone.

The carved oak chest, which formerly held the articles used for Holy Communion, is the one mentioned in a vestry order of November 29, 1677. Richard Perrot, Jr., owner of Bush Park Plantation, was paid 300 pounds of tobacco for the chest. It is the only documented piece of Virginia 17th century craftsmanship. It was on loan to the Dewitt-Wallace Gallery in 1999 for the 300th celebration of the founding of Williamsburg.

The marble grave stone is that of Mary Beverly, wife of Major Robert Beverly with a death date of June 1, 1678. The stone was discovered in 1922 when workmen were replacing the floor. It was eventually raised and relocated to its present position.

Tours available by appointment. Please contact the church office at 804-776-6250.

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LOWER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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Built 1717

Lower United Methodist Church is a vibrant and continuously growing church. We are able to lay building blocks for the future based on the knowledge of our past.

The early history of many colonial parishes is shrouded in obscurity due to the loss of early parish records. This is not so in Middlesex County where the historical vestry book for Christ Church has been preserved and published. It is believed that this vestry book is the only one in existence that antedates Bacon's Rebellion in 1676.

Authentic dates and records give credence to the assumption that worship began at the site of Lower Church in 1650 when a wooden "chapel of ease" was built in the lower precinct of Christ Church parish.

About 1657, what is now the County of Middlesex was composed of two parishes, the upper called Lancaster and the lower known as Peankatank. The first mention of "Peankatank" as Lower Chapel was in the records by 1666, and for the next quarter of a century the two names were used interchangeably; thus the origin of the name "Lower".

The present brick church was the second structure to be built on this site. It was completed in 1717 at a cost of 90,000 pounds of sweet-scented tobacco. Captain Henry Armistead and Major Edmond Berkeley were ordered to build the church. The oversized bricks, which were kilned on the property, weigh about 8 pounds each and are laid in the English bond pattern. Their large size makes the walls about 27" thick. A brick to the left of the

entrance has the inscription "17A15". It is believed that the "A" stands for Armistead and that the walls were complete to that date. To the right of the entrance are the initials "IW" which may stand for James Walker, an overseer for the project.

Lower Church still maintains its original clipped-hipped roof line. It is one of only two colonial churches in Virginia to have this distinction.

According to documentation the vestrymen experimented with two new plans for the new lower church; abandoning the old seventeenth-century arrangement in favor of a form that characterized all future Virginia rectangular churches.

The first worship service was held in the new church on October 25, 1717 and was conducted by the Reverend Bartholomew Yates.

In 1733 a 4 ½ foot high brick wall was ordered to be built around the church yard. Part of this was unearthed in 1964 during the construction of the second annex. In 1750 a gallery was added to the west end of the interior of the sanctuary.

The Church of England fell into disfavor after the Revolutionary War and many colonial churches fell into ruin or were vandalized. Lower Church was spared this desecration. At some point the Baptists and Methodists began to use the church for their worship services.

Lower Church became the property of the Methodist Episcopal Church South as the result of a suit begun in 1857 by the Protestant Episcopal Church against the Methodists and Robert Healy. Mr. Healy, a member of Christ Church and a trustee for Lower Church, refused to hand over the key. The ruling in March 1860 allowed the Methodists to purchase the Church for \$300.00 plus \$200.00 for repairs. Mr. Healy gave \$2.00 for every \$1.00 raised by the Methodists.

Many changes have occurred through the years. The interior began to take on a "Victorian" appearance in 1912 when the large east window was removed and replaced with a "Gothic" arch. The pulpit area was also extended outward.

Over time three annexes were added; the first in 1947, the second in 1965 and the third in 2005.

In 1970 major restoration and renovation was done giving the building its present appearance.

The church complex and acreage are listed on the Virginia Historic Landmarks Register (October 1972) and The National Register of Historic Places (April 1973).

Lower Church is one of a very few surviving colonial churches.